



STAR GAZETTE

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In our neck of the woods

Local author writes first children's book

By Kelsey Roy
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Knowing what you want to do with your life can be difficult. Local author Diane Davies always knew that writing children's books was on her bucket list. Check!

This month, Davies released "Life in the Neck: New Friends," the first in a series covering the life and antics of woodland friends.

"New Friends" covers the tale of friendship between Delaney, a white-tailed deer, Rocket the rabbit, and Cardinal Red the cardinal.

They often find themselves faced with the

lurking Old Coyote, but when trouble faces the Neck things take a surprising turn.

Davies previously wrote two "From There to Here: A Breast Cancer Journey" and "Breast Cancer Saved My Life." The first was the journal she kept after she was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2004. The later, what she considers a "thinking piece," reflecting on the life lessons she learned in her 12 years of survivorship.

Now, Davies said she is excited to be able to share her writing with children and get them excited about reading.

The Neck: Where inspiration flows

For the "Life in the Neck" series, Davies gets her inspiration not far from home.

"We happen to live in Denmark Township and have some beautiful property. I try to walk our driveway every day, or as close to every day as possible, and while I'm walking I have been inspired but the nature and stuff around me. And actually, in 'Life in the Neck,' the Neck is a long narrow strip of land along a river," Davies said. "Our driveway has historically called the Neck by Davies family forever. So the inspi-



Submitted photo
Former Hastings teacher Diane Davies has a new book out called "Life in the Neck: New Friends."

ration was just kind of there as I am walking the Neck and seeing the same animals every day and my imagination kicked in and the stories happen. It's kind of an interesting process."

Davies also finds her

inspiration from her 26 years as Hastings elementary school teacher.

Having taught first grade, Davies estimates that she has read hundreds, maybe thousands

BOOK: Page A3

BOOK

From Page A1

of books to kids. The number climbs now that she has two grandchildren living next door.

Part of that inspiration turned "Life in the Neck" into a teaching tool for teachers in the classroom.

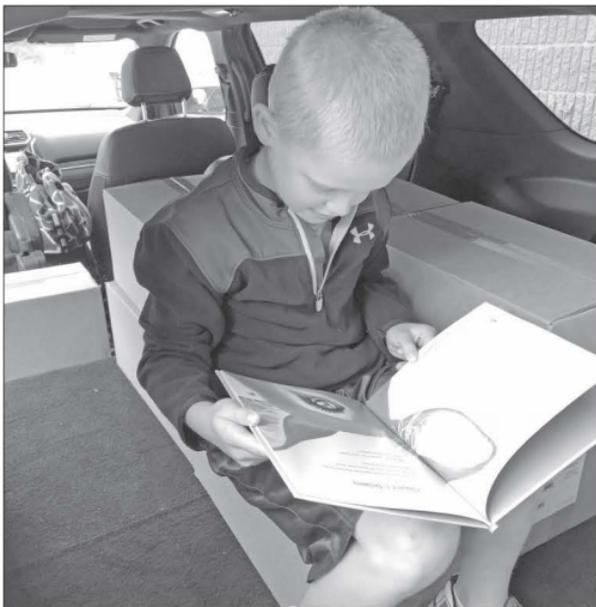
"Having been a teacher, I don't want something that's going to be a wasted piece of time in the classroom or wherever. It has a number of teaching points in it, and of course each one is about each one of the animals," Davies said.

Each of the three main characters has a chapter.

"There are a few facts, not tremendously deep facts, but you know a few facts about each one of these animals and their life in the Neck. And yes, the three of them become friends and they model for younger children what it means to be a friend — how you help a friend who is in trouble, how you work together to find solutions to problems."

Keeping the classroom in mind, Davies provides teachers with several lesson plans and ideas for how to use the book in a school setting including vocabulary flashcards and games. They are available at on her website, diannedavies.com.

"I know how busy teachers are and how nice it is to find a resource that is there and ready to use. All they have to do is click on it and print it out. It's ready to go. My thought is, 'Why not just



Submitted photo
Diane Davies' grandson Eli grabs a book fresh from the printer and starts reading.

make it easy for somebody?" Davies said.

Most importantly, Davies is inspired by her grandkids and the children she has taught in school.

Davies recalled the joy on her grandson Eli's face when she went to pick up the new books from the printer.

"All the books were loaded up in the back of my car, and he couldn't wait to get into the box, get a book out and start reading it. That's a big

joy. That's a huge joy. And if I can spread that feeling not only my grandchildren but also to children in the classroom, whether it's throughout Minnesota or throughout the country, I feel I've made a major contribution. That's what keeps me going," Davies said. Davies involves grandchildren Eli, 6, and Elsie, 11, in the process of her writing by testing her ideas out on them.

"They are my audience. I read my stories to them

first and get their reaction. One time Eli had a friend over and I wanted to read them one of my stories and get his friend's reaction. When I was done I asked him what he thought and he said, 'It's too long. It's good, but too long.' OK," Davies laughed. "These are my critics."

What's coming next

Davies has two books set to come out in early 2019.

The second in the series,

"Squirrel Trouble," was inspired by her grandson, who built a old-fashioned log cabin with his father last summer.

The other book is called "Jeannie Ann's Grandma Has Breast Cancer" and covers the topic of breast cancer in the point of view of a 6-year-old.

"Jeannie Ann's story comes from the idea that kids notice everything and ask questions about everything. I think it's important to answer those questions," Davies said.

Davies wants the story to give children a better understanding of breast cancer, Davies said, that existing literature for kids doesn't provide.

"The story goes on to explain to the audience what cancer is, what a tumor is, what a mastectomy is, those kinds of things. It has a happy ending. Grandma is healthy and fine, but I think it will be a worthwhile piece of information for children literature to have that," Davies said. "I've looked online and I found a few children's books about breast cancer, but none that satisfied me in terms of covering all the details. That's really why I put that one together. I am really excited about that one."

"Life in the Neck: New Friends" is available at Meloy Park Florist at the Midtown Shopping Center and S.C. Toys in downtown Hastings, and will soon be available on Amazon and Barnes and Noble.